

**Testimony of Molly Flanagan, Great Lakes Water Resources Advocate,
National Wildlife Federation**

**Impacts of Beach Maintenance and Removal of Vegetation
under Act 14 of 2003**

**Joint Committee Hearing:
Michigan House Natural Resources, Environment and Great Lakes Committee
Senate Natural Resources and Environment Committee**

May 9, 2006

Thank you, Madame Chair, Mr. Chair, and Members of the joint committee for this opportunity to present the National Wildlife Federation's comments regarding the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's report on the impacts of beach maintenance and removal of vegetation under Act 14 of 2003. My name is Molly Flanagan and I present these remarks on behalf of the National Wildlife Federation's 4 million members and supporters, including more than 200,000 members in Michigan.

Simply put, we feel that the negative impacts found to be associated with beach maintenance and vegetation removal necessitate that these provisions be allowed to sunset as called for by the law.

The findings of this report are particularly alarming to the National Wildlife Federation in the context of the Great Lakes region's unparalleled efforts to leverage billions of dollars from the United States Congress to restore the health of the Great Lakes. Like never before, the region's Congressional delegation, as well as Governors, mayors, tribes, farmers, business leaders, conservationists, and others have rallied behind a Great Lakes restoration plan, and legislation to turn that plan into action.

A 2003 Joyce Foundation poll asked Great Lakes residents if protecting and restoring the Great Lakes is important, 96 percent said yes. Ninety six percent. You can't get 96 percent to agree on what day it is – but they agree on the importance of the Great Lakes.

Last December, sixty of the leading scientists in the Great Lakes region issued an alarming report. In a paper titled "Prescription for Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection and Restoration" (accompanying this testimony), the scientists concluded that the Great Lakes are experiencing an historic crisis. Deterioration of large sections of their ecosystem is accelerating dramatically, and if not addressed now, the damage is likely to be irreversible. One of its primary authors, Michigan Sea Grant Director Dr. Don Scavia, recently presented its findings and recommendations before a Congressional committee field briefing chaired by Congressman Vern Ehlers.

The scientists concluded that large-scale ecosystem changes result from the loss of the Great Lakes' capacity to buffer themselves against sources of stress – essentially, damage

to the Great Lakes immune system. Much of the buffering capacity for the Great Lakes comes from healthy near-shore communities and tributaries, including wetlands.

The scientists' top recommendation for restoring the health of the Great Lakes is to restore and enhance critical near-shore areas and tributaries. In other words, the areas where the DEQ report found negative impacts from beach maintenance and vegetation removal are the very areas where the region's top scientists are saying we need to do more in the way of protection and restoration.

Coastal wetlands in Saginaw Bay and Grand Traverse Bay help drive a multi-billion dollar outdoor recreation industry in Michigan. Family traditions like waterfowl hunting in Saginaw Bay or fishing for smallmouth bass in Grand Traverse Bay simply could not happen without coastal wetlands.

Michigan should be aligning its efforts with the rest of the Great Lakes region by doing more to protect and restore these precious resources. We should start by allowing the beach maintenance and vegetation removal provisions of PA 14 of 2003 to sunset as required by the law.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.